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STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING



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SUPERINTENDENT OF
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Michael P. Flanagan, Chairman 

SUBJECT: Education Legislation Update

The Legislature returned from their two-week spring break on April 18. Upon their return, the Governor had a bill signing ceremony at Otto Middle School in Lansing of the new High School Graduation Requirements (Public Acts 123 and 124 of 2006). It was a great day. I was especially pleased to see the bi-partisan turn out of legislators, members of the State Board of Education, and many others. Not only were the chairs and the minority vice-chairs of the House and Senate education committees in attendance, but so were all of the legislative leadership – Senator Sikkema, Senator Emerson, Speaker DeRoche and Minority Leader Byrum. In such a highly partisan environment, I think such a turnout is extremely positive and demonstrates that issues like education can rise above traditional partisanship.

The Governor also signed into law two other education initiatives. Senator Cassis's K-3 early intervention package was signed into law (Public Acts 118-121 of 2006). Also, the Student Safety bill, which clarifies what school employee conviction data can be made public, was signed (Public Act 84 of 2006). Finally, the recodification of the Public Transportation Act was completed by the Legislature and signed into law (Public Acts 107 and 108 of 2006).

There has been additional action on the following legislative issues:

1. **Administrative Certification.** Senator Ron Jelinek (R-Three Oaks) introduced SB 673-74 at the Department's request. These bills provide voluntary administrative certification and are a direct result of State Board of Education's leadership on the issue. The bills passed

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the Senate late last year. The bills were reported out of the House Education Committee on April 26 and should be passed by the full House in early May.

2. **Accelerated College Bills.** House Bills 5903-04, introduced by Representative Hoogendyk (R-Portage) and Representative Palmer (R-Romeo), were reported out of the House Government Operations on April 25. The legislation is similar to a package of bills introduced last session. The Department took a position of being opposed to the bills as introduced (as did the Department of Treasury). The bills essentially allow a student who attends a high school and has met one-half of the state high school graduation requirements or has received an overall score in the top 20 percent of a nationally recognized college admission examination to be eligible to enter a college program. Additionally, the Michigan Higher Education Assistance Authority will provide grants to help supplement the tuition costs. Major department concerns include:

Only one-half of the just passed high school graduation requirements would have to be met.

Students, under NCLB, would be considered dropouts since they will have left high school without a diploma. This could cause schools to miss meeting AYP requirements.

There is no funding for this bill.

The grants would only provide partial assistance to students, thus, students with limited resource would be less likely to participate.

Developing solutions to these concerns are important. It is also possible that changes in the Dual Enrollment law could be incorporated in this package of bills.

3. **Department Budget.** In April, Board Member John Austin testified at the Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Education and K-12. His testimony encouraged continued funding of the "Best Practices" study being implemented by the Department. He was effective, as the sub-committee has added \$200,000 in the Department's budget bill for next year. It appears the Department is going to receive \$250,000 to administer the implementation of the new high school graduation requirements. Perhaps the most controversial part of the bill is an additional \$1.5 million for web-based practice assessments for middle school students. This funding is from the General Fund, and it is not

clear whether such funding will be available as the negotiations on the budget evolve.

4. **School for the Blind Legislation.** Representative Mike Murphy (D-Lansing) introduced HB 5354, a bill designed to sell the School for the Blind campus in Lansing. As introduced, the bill would convey the property to the Mid-Michigan Leadership Academy. The Department of Education's interest in this sale has been to eliminate significant administrative costs to maintain the facility. After introduction of the bill, several groups expressed concerns. First, the City of Lansing raised an issue about the sale of property within its boundaries and how that property should be used. Second, advocates for the blind community felt that any funds for the sale of the property should be put into programs for the blind community – such diversions are something that the Michigan Department of Management and Budget has traditionally opposed. The bill was reported out of committee and currently sits on the House floor. The City of Lansing is working out some final concerns. It is not clear what the future of this legislation will be. It has been suggested that since private funds have, in the past, been used to subsidize the School for the Blind, that significant funds should be placed in the Michigan School for the Blind Trust Fund. If this bill passes the House, it is the Department's plan to make this argument in the Senate.

As in the past, if you have any questions on these or other issues, please do not hesitate to contact Bob Morris.